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THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF PROHIBITION.

IN this paper I desire to touch upon a single aspect of the important problem which is now agitating the great American public. The moral, religious, and educational phases of the temperance movement receive ample attention, yet the subject is seldom treated from a purely economic standpoint. This inattention to the economic aspect of prohibition is, on the part of the economists, largely due to the emphasis they attach to the "let alone" policy in all commercial transactions. Since Adam Smith the whole force of economic thought has been directed to the tearing down of all restrictions, and the creation of perfect freedom in all exchanges. Yet, in spite of this general movement, many restrictions upon the actions of individuals have of late years been enforced, and there is now a strong movement among economists to extend much more protection to the average man against the aggressions of the few who are so situated that they gain by the loss of the many.

Prohibition viewed from an economic standpoint is of especial importance at the present time, because some of the most popular arguments which our opponents use can be answered only by an examination of the economic basis of prohibition. You often hear it claimed that the present agitation against the use of liquor is a passing movement based upon a mere sentiment which will drop out of notice as soon as its friends find some new hobby. What, it is asked, has this agitation to distinguish it from the Know-nothing movement, the anti-Mason craze, or any of the dozen other sentimental excitements which have come and gone within the memory of many who are now living?

Even if no one asked such questions as these, yet similar

questions arise in the mind as soon as we think of the great change in public opinion about temperance, which has taken place within the last half century. Why has there been a growing dissatisfaction with the drinking habit during all this period? It cannot be accounted for upon moral or religious grounds, since we would not claim for ourselves any great superiority over our grandfathers in these respects. They had their religious and moral awakenings and revivals, and were keen and pronounced in their denunciations of all the evils they saw or felt, and yet they never took a stand against drinking in the way that all present religious and moral bodies are forced to do. Even those who see no good in prohibition are compelled to acknowledge the evils of drinking and to devise plans by which they can be removed.

From these facts there can be but one inference. The people of America are discontented with freedom in drinking. Something of importance has happened within the last fifty years which has entirely changed the public mind as to alcohol and its various compounds. In some fundamental way our civilization has been changed so that the evils of drinking have been forced into prominence.

Any explanation of this change involves a much wider and deeper investigation than is contained in a mere study of our drinking problems. Our eating as well as our drinking habits must be examined before we can clearly see the laws which govern our appetites. From the time of the primitive man until now there have been gradual changes in men which make their desire for food and drink different from that of our early ancestors.

The first law to which I shall call attention is this: Every increase in the variety of food reduces appetite. If a person lives upon rice or potatoes alone he must have a much larger quantity of food than if several articles are parts of his daily diet. Each new article contains new ingredients which can supply some needs of the system more fully than other foods have done. There is a great

economy in the use of a large variety of articles, as through them the needs of the system are supplied with much less waste than if any one article formed the sole diet. Every increase in the variety of food, by diminishing the quantity of food which the system needs to maintain health, reduces the appetite of the consumer.

There are also many other changes in food which have aided in the reduction of our appetites. Where the food-supply is very irregular, so that periods of plenty and famine follow one another regularly, enough must be eaten during the one period to enable the eater to hold out during the other, and for this reason he will need a stronger appetite than if he was supplied with three good meals each day. The greater use of clothing and fuel for our houses also reduces our need of food, and thus acts upon our appetites. Coal and wood now take the place of the large quantities of fat food with which our ancestors used to keep themselves warm. Our stomachs call for less food when we live in close houses with hot air pouring into each room. Our coal-bins grow in size while the pantries occupy less space. If anyone doubts the gradual reduction of our appetites, even a casual examination of our eating habits must convince him of the great change which is going on all around him. Our forefathers ate great quantities of a few articles, while to-day we want a little of a great variety of articles. Notice the increase in the variety of food offered at our markets or in our stores. See the difference in the quantity and quality of the food which our immigrants eat as compared with the food of families of whom several generations have resided in this country. The appetite for fat food has been so reduced that it is only eaten in the form of butter, while many of the coarse foods of former days have entirely disappeared.

This evident fact of the decrease of the appetite lies at the basis of the change in our drinking habits. A century ago some one drink satisfied the wants of each nation. This was usually a light drink, of which large quantities

were consumed. These drinks were in every house, and used as freely as tea or coffee now are.

In this way the reduction in our appetites tends to intensify the evils of drinking. With each reduction in their appetites drinkers resort to variety in their drinks or to stronger drinks, and are thus forced into conditions in which the habit will grow upon them. When a society reaches this stage its members must stop drinking or gradually sink into drunkards. The first course is likely to be chosen by those who have the weakest appetites, and are thus less tempted by liquor; while the latter path has so great a charm for those with strong appetites that they are likely to be hurried along to the drunkard's grave. Society thus gets split into two parties: the one searching the world over for stronger drinks and more stimulation, while the other, dropping all liquor out of its diet, searches all over the same world for a greater variety in food. Almost every ship brings in a new drink for the one class and a new food for the other. As differently as the two classes may act, yet the same economic tendency is at work in both cases. The appetite is reduced and old foods and drinks have lost their former attraction. The one class stop drinking to get new kinds of food, while the other use coarser food so as to have more stimulating drink.

The reduction of the appetite is not, however, the only active economic cause forcing the temperance issue upon the American people. There are many climatic and social conditions peculiar to America which aggravate the evils of alcohol. Perhaps the best way to illustrate my meaning will be to contrast our country with Germany. We hear so much about the immense quantity of liquor used by the Germans that we are apt to imagine that it is a land of drunkards, yet they suffer less from drunkenness than we do. The cause of this difference lies largely in climatic conditions. Germany has a steady unchanging climate. It is never very hot or very cold, nor is it subject to sudden changes in the weather. The ocean keeps it cool in sum-

mer and moderates the winter. As a result, the need for drink remains about the same through the year. Each person acquires a habit of drinking a fixed number of glasses each day, from which he rarely departs. This habit is reinforced by the German custom which forbids treating. Each one orders his own liquor and pays for it, and is thus kept from the temptation of drinking more than he would or what he does not want. I do not say that in Germany the evils from drinking are not plainly visible, nor that they are not increasing, but the climate of the country and the habits of the people keep the evil within bounds, and will continue to do so long after it has become intolerable in other localities less favorable by nature and by the usage of the people.

In turning our attention to America, the contrast is very marked. With the possible exception of Siberia, no large country has so variable a climate. Dry hot summers are followed by piercing cold winters. When our melting weather comes we need large quantities of water to replace the waste through perspiration. Our drinkers resort to the various compounds of alcohol to get the needed water and thus use much larger quantities than they otherwise would.

Again, in winter the same tendency is seen. We all know that alcohol does not keep the body warm, yet it deadens the nerves of the drinker so that he cannot feel the cold. It thus deceives the user, and causes him to resort again and again to his bottle to keep out the chilling blasts of winter. Alcohol will keep a man cool or it will keep him warm. It is thought to be a sure remedy in either case. So each spell of hot or of cold weather sends an increasing host of customers to every saloon in the land. In this way every change in the weather increases the use of liquor and helps to fasten upon its users habits which they would not acquire in a moderate climate.

To these evils must be added those which come from our social condition. Treating is so universal that a per-

son is looked upon as mean who will drink without asking his friends to drink with him. In this way men drink not only more than they otherwise would, but also they do what is much worse—drink a greater variety. By the time a group of half a dozen friends have each treated, as many different kinds of liquor are mixed together in their stomachs, and this mixture of drinks is, as we have seen, one of the leading causes of drunkenness.

I have compared the condition of Germany with our own country to show why the evils of intemperance are so much more prominent here, and why it is that we are forced into a prohibition agitation so much more quickly than has been the case in foreign lands. It shows also why our immigrants are so indifferent, if not opposed, to the temperance movement. They do not see why their old habits fitted for another continent are unsuited for their best development here. If we are to win them to our cause, it will not be by moral arguments, but by a clear presentation of the economic causes which force Americans to discard alcohol. Our climate and social conditions are fixed factors in our civilization, and immigrants must adjust themselves to their new environment or sink into misery and vice. Even at the present time the reaction against drinking can be plainly seen among the second generation of the Germans and Irish, and the day is not far distant when they will be as active in temperance work as the descendants of the first settlers now are.

One more cause of increased drunkenness needs to be mentioned before the full force of the present situation can be clearly seen. In olden times no strong liquor could be made. The process of distillation, which has made strong drinks possible, is a modern invention. To this evil has been added a new one, arising from the use of cheaper material in making liquor. Rye has been displaced by corn in the manufacture of whiskey, and in Germany even potatoes are called into use. The miserable stuff which is thus thrown upon the market lacks any of the redeeming

qualities which were possessed by the pure liquors used in former days. No one can drink it without having his higher nature dwarfed, and he soon becomes a mere brute, the willing slave of an abnormal craving.

If I have made myself clear, you will recognize how fundamental are the changes which have forced the temperance issue upon the American people. They are all of an economic nature, and will make us put ourselves in harmony with our present environment, no matter how many inherited ideas must be displaced before a solution is found. Each person is compelled to make a choice which will place him among the law-abiding citizens who cultivate innocent amusements or among those who stimulate their appetites and passions by the coarse pleasures of the saloon.

There is, I confess, a degree of truth in the charge that prohibition often stimulates crime. Separate out the good in society from the bad, and you take from the bad many of the restraints which keep them from crime. In this way every measure that makes the good better makes the bad worse. The sharper the lines are drawn between the two classes, the more will the good progress and the quicker will the bad run through their downward course. With prohibition it is easier to be good and more dangerous to be bad. Do not, however, understand me as saying that prohibition increases the number of criminals. It shuts off the supply of criminals by removing one of the leading temptations to crime. But those who deliberately choose the wrong path become more vicious and force themselves more into public attention.

It should, however, never be forgotten that the Prohibition party is not the cause, but merely the effect, of the ever-increasing evils of intemperance. It is weak appetites, a variable climate, and cheap adulterated liquors that are the causes of the abnormal craving which leads to crime. And did prohibition cause any of these? No. It is merely an effect of these economic causes through which society seeks

to ward off some of the evils which flow from them. Those who live out of harmony with their economic environment must pay the penalty, and they have no ground for complaint, even if they slide into vice a little more rapidly because their neighbors are seeking to protect themselves more fully against the worst temptation of modern civilization.

When we clearly see that Prohibition is the effect of powerful economic causes, we place ourselves in a position to judge of the outcome. Separate society into two classes with different habits, customs, and diet, and that class will displace the other which makes the best use of the resources of our country. The temperance people put our land to a much more productive use than do their drinking and smoking neighbors. See how destructive of the qualities of the soil a crop of tobacco is, and the crops from which liquor is made are as bad. Two temperance people can be supported on the land needed to satisfy the coarse tastes of one regular frequenter of the saloon. For this reason the economic advantage of the abstainers is so great that they will increase in numbers much more rapidly than the drinkers do, and will in the end form a large majority of our population. They will gradually acquire a larger share of the land and capital of the country, and by their numbers and influence suppress their opponents or force them to reform.

In this respect the slavery contest furnishes a good example. At the start at least half of the wealth and population of the country was on the side of the South. But the use which slave labor made of the land was much inferior to that made by freemen of the North. As a result the North increased in numbers and wealth much more rapidly than the South. When the decisive moment came the North was so superior in both these regards, that even a forcible resistance on the part of the South was of no avail. It was the economic advantage of the North, and not the

superior bravery or morality of its people, that made them the masters of the situation. The same result must follow in the great contest which is now opening to counteract the destructive tendencies of alcoholic drinks. Slowly and steadily the abstainers gain upon their rivals through the better use they make of the land, as well as through the fact that their habits and diet fit them better for the climatic and the social conditions of our country.

In closing, let us return for a moment to the main question: Is the growing dissatisfaction with drinking habits the result of permanent causes which will keep grinding along until they force the American people to prohibit their use? The answer to this question must be sought, not in morals or politics, but in economics. I have tried to point out how incongruous are these habits with our climate and civilization. If our appetites are diminishing, if our climate makes moderate drinking especially difficult, if not impossible, and if the crops from which our liquors are made waste the productive powers of the land and prevent its best use, surely we have the best reasons for believing that the present dissatisfaction with drinking will continue and increase until it generates a sentiment and a moral tone which will be powerful enough to close every saloon and distillery in our land.

Our civilization has advanced too far for us to think of making or keeping drinking respectable. The use of light drinks is not an equilibrium at which people can long remain. Every reduction of their appetites makes them dissatisfied unless the strength of their liquor is increased. Weak appetites need strong drinks to give that stimulation for which the drinker resorts to alcohol. Prohibitionists are not responsible for the fact that drinking is no longer respectable. It arises solely from that graded series of drinks found in every saloon by which the drinker passes gradually to stronger drinks as weaker ones lose their attraction. This tendency divides society into two parts,

and forces the respectable to join in a compact opposition to all drinking. The sharper this contest becomes the more have the abstainers to gain. Little by little will their economic advantage increase their strength, until their moral influence will keep the drinker from the saloon and their political power will take the saloon from the drinker.

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